

**Jumbled Seasons**  
**Preached by**  
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**United Church of Fayetteville**  
**September 11, 2022**

**For Reflection:** *“New Year’s Day is but one of 365 mornings each year that can afford me a new start toward glory.”*  
George Sheehan

**Hebrew Scripture:** *Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

<sup>3</sup>For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup>a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup>a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; <sup>7</sup>a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup>a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

**Epistle Reading:** *2 Timothy 1.5-10a*

<sup>4</sup>Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup>I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. <sup>6</sup>For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; <sup>7</sup>for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. <sup>8</sup>Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, <sup>9</sup>who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup>but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.

**Meditation**     *Jumbled Seasons*

It is good to see so many of you here today. (I really hoped when I wrote that sentence, there would be reason to say it:-) Today is a cusp time—the tipping point between two times or events—in our case, “seasons,” inside and outside the church. Our lives and thoughts are a jumble of what has been, what is coming, one often contradicting or replacing another.

At first glance, the worship elements this morning might also seem to be a bit of a jumble. The quote for reflection refers to New Year’s Day. This is not January 1, of course, but it is a day when the church lurches into a new schedule of programming, offerings and service—a new year for us.

Our opening hymn *“Morning has Broken”* is yes, originally a hymn. The first cover was not done by Cat Stevens. In the church, *“Morning has Broken”* is most frequently associated with and sung on Easter morning and we are blessedly a few months away from that. Our Hebrew scripture lesson from

Ecclesiastes is most often associated with funerals. It also was the inspiration for the song *“Turn, Turn, Turn,”* which has led some outside the church to think Pete Seger wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes.

These images do reflect the new season breaking before us—a season of the earth, of our personal lives and civic schedules and for the church. The state fair is behind us for another year. School is back in session. We have warm days and cool nights. We’re shifting to new rhythms of the day and week. Some have gone off to college for the first time. Some parents are emptying their nest for the first time. Some parents and children are glad school has started and some are not, and rarely are matching sets with those feelings in the same household. We are all glad that whatever the year holds, we can anticipate fewer COVID restrictions on our lives—provided we remain careful and courteous to others.

Some of us are refreshed by summer and for some of us it didn’t meet up to expectations. Some of us are focused on squeezing in those last few summer activities while the weather holds, while others of us are putting the gardens to bed and getting ready to nest. The earth is drawing into itself, even as our activities and energies move in new ways and directions. Altogether, these things spark a collection of images reflecting rising and dying, endings and beginnings. Inside and outside of these walls, regardless of the date of the solstice, fall has indeed broken amid a sense of scrambled seasons. It is already among us, both fresh and new and also like what we have seen before.

Here at UCF, it’s our first official day of the program year, marked by a return to 10AM worship. For many of us that seems like it won’t start until next week, when we have the fall brunch. That brunch used to happen on this very first day of the new timetable, until it became clear so many of us were wrapping up summer in these last few hectic days. It became too difficult to plan for a first day brunch. No matter, it will be next week (and if you haven’t signed up and told us what food you’ll be sharing do, do that today.) You may also sign up on line using the link in the last weekly email.

What is this new year we are beginning? What starts now that hasn’t been happening before? God has been here all along, of course. We’ve had worship every Sunday, so it’s not a New Year’s Day for worship. Most of us have been away at least some of the time and a few of us have summered elsewhere.

What we are doing is gathering together again and reforming ourselves as one community after a time of diaspora. For us and all the world, that scattering has lasted far longer than any in our lifetime. We are anticipating our first “normal” autumn in three years. There are changes here and everywhere, yes, but we have a chance to be together in ways we have not been for years. If we learned nothing else from the pandemic (in fact, we learned a great deal), we learned of the importance and power of being present to one another and just being able to be with one another.

As many of us as are here today, we are also aware of those who are not—which brings us to the purple card in your bulletin. These are some folk we may not have seen in a while. Some of them were here when we weren’t. Some have been waiting for the service time change as 9:30 AM is early for them to be out and about. Some have changed their worship pattern during the pandemic. They intend to be back, but haven’t made it yet. Others discovered after getting past the initial technical challenges and loss of opportunity to be together, that streaming offers the convenience of not having to change out of pajamas, being able to drink coffee or talk on the phone during worship. Others appreciate the convenience of being able to watch it on Wednesday instead of Sunday morning. Any of those reasons could be one or more reason we are missing some people. None of them should incur judgement.

Please note that I said, “We are missing them,” not “They are missing.” One reason people aren’t here should never be that we haven’t communicated to each and every person—they are important, valued, missed and that we are less together without them than with them.

On each purple card is a name and some contact information. They are also all in the directory, so if you prefer to do your homework :-)) with a note, you can easily do so. They may have been here more often than you or me this summer. Your assignment is this:

Contact the household this week. Ask how their summer went. Tell them you are looking forward to being together with them in church. If you don’t know them, feel free to identify yourself as someone from UCF. Anyone can feel free to say this is sermon homework if it makes one more comfortable, although you might want to make it sound more like “Linda encouraged us to pick names out of a pot and I lucked out and got yours.” If you haven’t seen them for a while, let’s assume it’s because you have been away when they were here, and say, “I just wanted to catch up.” The goal of the conversation is to communicate care and interest. Conclude with the happy reminder that next Sunday is the Fall Brunch which follows a child-focused worship service. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if this could be a late summer, early fall “family reunion of UCFers? It’s a high energy day. How cool would it be if at the last minute, Fellowship had to jam more tables and chairs into fellowship Hall because so many of us are here?!

In addition, there are upcoming new ways to connect. Penny and Shirley are creating a “little lending library” in Women’s Lounge and sign-ups will be available for casual in-home desserts in October. There is likely to be sign ups ready for Outreach activities associated with Church in the World Sunday.

In these jumbled seasonal days, let our goal be a UCF family reunion that packs and overflows Fellowship Hall next week. In the midst of myriad images and tumbling thoughts and times, as Christians we are always living in the present, leaning forward toward the future, hopeful for the time to come. In so doing, we are called to acknowledge that the grace-given gifts of worship, community and hope are not given for our use alone. They are meant to be shared and spread more widely. This day we are asked to carry the welcome we have received in this place beyond these walls, that we might begin our New Year together in the way we mean to continue—in supporting and encouraging one another, may we spread Christ’s love and service ever more widely.

### **Prayers for Others and Ourselves**

Most compassionate God: As we do gather together, forming and reforming ourselves into a community of love, hope and service, our prayers now turn toward your wider world, that the welcome we have received by your grace may continue to flow more widely in the world.

On this weekend, we remember a day of terror and a loss of life our country had not seen on its own land in many decades—a day that changed the way we think about the world and our place among the nations. We remember the dead and the living, the heroes and those who serve in their place and give thanks for their offerings and grieve for their loss. We give thanks for the knowledge, even so painfully acquired, that what we do touches many lives and lands and we are interconnected with all nations.

We remember people in Pakistan, Guatemala and Haiti, where earthquakes, flood waters and mudslides, and civil unrest destroy lives, many already at the barest level of existence.

We remember and we pray. We pray to begin with education here at home, until we and all people know that safety is not created by burning books or amassing weapons. We pray for a world where the words “ethnic” and “cleansing” never again appear in the same sentence, let alone suggest to anyone that such words or actions clean anything but know they only sear souls and abuse the diversity of your creation.

We pray for a world where a sense of safety is born in food, health and access to education for all people, not in its hoarding for a few. Lord, for our world and for ourselves, may it be that through the praying comes awareness and intention, so that we might follow your son’s footsteps to serve those in need with whatever capacity we have in what ever ways we can.

We pray in Christ’s name, who called us together, charged us to go into the world and accompanies us in service – with these words and images and the prayer he taught us to pray together...

#### **The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day, our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors  
and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil,**

**for thine is the kingdom and the power  
and the glory forever. Amen.**